

weakness, has given us brethren, in order that we may reveal ourselves to them, and so complete the prayer that we have begun.

THERE is a shining order that marks the nobler soul—he raiseth his eyes to the higher life even in his very joys.

THE tears flow faster and heavier the less the earth can give you, and the higher above it you stand,—even as the clouds which are farthest from the earth send the largest drops.

WE accept contradiction or blame far more willingly than is believed, only we can bear none that is hasty, even if it were just. Hearts are flowers. To the light falling dew they remain open, but they close themselves before the heavy raindrops.

CERTAIN people appear *hard* in the very moment of tenderness or emotion. They are like the snow, which freezes shortly before melting.

TO a strong character, great joys and great sorrows serve as heights from whence to survey the whole path of life.

Grace.

A NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

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II. The Idea of Grace.

'GIVE me great ideas,' a great thinker used to exclaim. Grace is one of the greatest ideas that ever entered the mind of man. And it is as delightful as it is great. It is also so intelligible that a child can understand it. We can scarcely exaggerate its expulsive and creative power, for the apostle says: 'By the grace of God I am what I am'; and Samuel Rutherford confesses: 'I am grace's man.'

This idea belongs exclusively to the Christian religion. For it is found in no heathen religion, in no pre-Christian writer. The gods of Greece and Rome had no touch of grace about them, except in their pictures and statues; they were mean and envious towards one another, and specially so towards man. The name for prayer was *votum*, which means a mercenary bargain, an offer made in the hope of bribing their gods, or buying off their anger beforehand. I am not aware that there is one graceful heathen idol on the face of the earth to-day. The heathen gods of to-day are selfish and malignant, the horrid projections of the natural fears of the conscience-stricken. The heathen do not pray to them for good things, but only *deprecate*, or *pray-off*, evil things. *Devil-devil* is the only word for god among the Australian aborigines. This original word must mean that to their thinking all the gods are doubly devilish. Demonology is their theology.

A passion for clear ideas ranks high among the noblest endowments of the thinker and teacher.

It is often baffled in the theologian; but it may be gratified by the study of grace.

Etymology is here the handmaid of theology. *Χάρις*, as the last article showed, is that which has charm and gives joy. Gladness is thus an essential part of our idea of grace.

Analysis shows that the Bible idea of grace is not perfectly simple; for it embraces grace both in its fountain and in its streams, grace in the heart and in the hand of God. The former is incommunicable, the latter is for us. This idea, logically divided, contains 'the grace of God,' and 'the gift by grace.' But this distinction need not embarrass our study, as each text and context shows which side of grace is intended.

Our average hearers miss much by not catechising themselves closely upon their conception of grace. They often confound grace and love. Now there can be no grace without love, but there may be love without grace. Love unites those who are *like* each other; it finds equals or makes them; it is the intensity of the feeling which recognised likeness creates. Grace has not play between equals or those who are like each other. Love flows forth on a level; grace flows down to the sunken. The Queen loves her children, but shows grace to her subjects. God's love in presence of our sins reaches out a saving hand to us in our deep degradation. That is grace in action. It is God's amazing, stooping love pouring itself out, with infinite delight, upon the unloving and unlovely, and finding its reward in

the gladness which comes from the act. It is God's free favour to those who deserve nothing but punishment, the whole of God's loving kindness to sinful men.

'Grace and mercy' is a double phrase, which helps to reveal the scope of the idea. Grace and mercy are twin sisters, and their mother's name is love. Grace is God's love in action towards the sinful; mercy is God's love in action towards the miserable. As we are both sinners and miserables, grace and mercy are to be distinguished, but never divided. In the saint's heart, as in the formula of benediction, they always go together, and their united product is peace.

We find the salt of the ocean in shining crystals on the shore, but we also find it in solution in every drop of sea-water. Grace pervades the Bible as the salt pervades the sea. This master-idea of grace has nearly as many facets as the flashing diamond. Let us note a few of them.

1. Grace is the very crown of God's attributes, 'His darling attribute,' from which He takes His title, as His whole nature is seen in it. Mercy and judgment both belong to God, but not in the same sense. 'He delighteth in mercy,' but judgment is His *alienum opus*, 'His strange work.' Contrast God's delay in punishing Adam in Eden with the father's eager haste in welcoming the returning prodigal: He *walked* then, nor did He start till 'the cool of the day'; but the father *ran* at once, and with his kiss of forgiveness he cut short the prodigal's confession in the middle. Punishment is thus God's work, not properly, but improperly, through the sin of man; the work of His hand rather than of His heart. He punishes with an 'unwilling willingness'; but salvation is 'according to the good pleasure of His will.' He is pleased with nothing that He willeth so much as with this. He is thus called 'the Father of mercies,' never 'the Father of revenges,' though He takes vengeance on our inventions. Grace is thus an essential and eternal property in God's nature. But it is not the only property; for He is love, and light, and a consuming fire.

2. *Outgoing* or *action* belongs to the idea of grace. God, the giver of grace, is as the sun (Ps. lxxxiv. 11). Now the sun is 'the hearth of the universe;' for the sun to be is to shine, and to shine is to give. Grace is an ocean seeking an outlet upon the dry land, as a full spring that must overflow and bear every barrier down. *Bonum est sui diffusivum*. The genius of grace, its divine necessity, its business is to go forth. It is God's nature, as it is His joy, to impart.

3. Grace implies *sin*, and such sin as makes self-salvation impossible. Grace can reign only among those who have sins to be forgiven and wants to be supplied. We are never told that God offers grace to the un sinning angels. To minimise sin is to minimise the grace that pardons and conquers it. The doctrine of sin and the doctrine of grace flourish and decay together.

4. Grace always gives *freely*. '*Gratia, nisi gratis sit, non est gratia*,' says Augustine. 'A deserved grace' is as unthinkable to the logical and theological mind as a 'holy sin' or 'a learned ignoramus.' A deserved grace ceases to be grace, and must take the name of justice. Grace is not of merit, but merit is of grace. 'Freely by His grace' might be written across every page in the New Testament. Its theology is the gift-theology. Even its rewards are rewards of grace. Yet Faber somewhere speaks of 'freights of merit shipped hourly from the harbour of faith for the suffering church in purgatory.'

5. Grace covers the *whole* of salvation, from its first purpose in the heart of God, through all its developments in time, and on to its final consummation in glory; and it also covers the whole of a Christian's experience. Thus we speak of preventing grace, pardoning grace, restraining grace, etc., dying grace, and the grace of final acceptance. Grace and gracings—*Χάρις*, *Χάρισμα*—that is the Bible style everywhere. Each power for service is a *Charism*. The whole New Testament palpitates with grace. All the sacred writers work *con amore* in the climates and life-sphere of free grace.